



We Need our Conservation Authorities

The Government of Ontario, beginning in May 2017, has made legislative amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act—this is the law that governs how conservation authorities operate in Ontario. Throughout early 2020, the provincial government hosted consultations with municipalities, conservation authorities, landowners, developers, and environmental organizations.

In their recent proposals, the Government of Ontario has proposed to limit the mandate of conservation authorities. Rather than having a fulsome mandate to protect and steward watersheds across the province, the government has proposed limiting conservation authority programs and scope of work to natural hazards (ie: flooding risks). This leaves many local programs such as water monitoring, climate change adaptation and wetland restoration vulnerable to cuts. These are programs that conservation authorities mandate locally, based on the needs of the watershed they help to safeguard. Each watershed in Ontario has specific needs. Healthy watersheds are supported by many different types of programs, designed to support those specific needs (locally-mandated programs). Lacking legislative clarity from the province, **many important locally mandated programs may be at increased risk of cuts.**

Programs such as reforestation, agricultural stewardship, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and water monitoring (both quality and quantity) are potentially at risk. More events and educational offerings such as Children’s Water Festivals or school outreach programs could also be at risk. Losing any of these programs would make our watersheds vulnerable and our conservation efforts less effective. Eliminating water monitoring and data collection services that conservation authorities provide would be of particular concern because we cannot address issues if we are not aware of them.

In early 2020, Environmental Defence, Canadian Environmental Law Association and WWF Canada assembled a survey questionnaire for researchers who make frequent use of conservation authority monitoring data to better understand

how important it is. The survey revealed that this data is instrumental in floodplain mapping, water quality improvements, and in safeguarding human health and drinking water sources. The findings demonstrate that researchers place a high value on conservation authority data and monitoring programs are very important to watershed conservation and health in Ontario.



This infographic highlights some key results



An overwhelming majority of respondents highly value water monitoring data from conservation authorities. This data has led to scientific progress and a better understanding of our watersheds and their health in Ontario. The data has been used to improve human health, habitat protection, and environmental education. The vast majority of respondents believe that conservation authorities are well-positioned to deliver many environmental programs including flood plain mapping, conservation, and wetland stewardship.

The results of the survey also demonstrate that researchers rely on conservation authority water monitoring data every year. This is another reason that the full mandate, including locally mandated programs, needs to be maintained. We must resist legislative or regulatory amendments that would fracture conservation authority programs and their ability to address local watershed priorities and threats.

In addition to these survey results, in April 2020, **112 organizations** across the environmental, recreation, agricultural, engineer and commercial sectors [sent a letter to the Premier of Ontario](#) asking the government to maintain fulsome conservation authority programs and mandates. Further cuts to how conservation authorities' programs are delivered would have a devastating impact on the health of our watersheds in Ontario. Instead of making programs harder to deliver or cutting them completely, Ontario must invest in the conservation authority model and support healthy watersheds.

Further changes to conservation authority legislation and regulations are expected in fall 2020 and early 2021. **In order to keep Ontarians safe and support clean water, air and lands, any proposed policy changes need to uplift conservation authorities.**

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